Education of the Young in Today's India

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PSYCHOLOGY OF RELIGION: INSIGHTS FOR EDUCATION IN INDIA

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0. Introduction

0.1. Psychology of Religion: A Gentle Introduction

Psychology of religion is now a well acknowledged branch of psychology that uses the theoretical framework and methodology of psychology to examine religious phenomena. More precisely, it studies the effect of religiosity and spirituality on human mind and behaviour - collective and individual.

Early psychologists like Wilhelm Wundt (1832-1920), William James (1842-1910), Stanley Hall (1844-1924), Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), Edwin Starbuck (1866-1947), and Carl Jung (1875-1961) were concerned with the impact of religion on human behaviour and wellbeing. However, Freud's negative[2] conclusions about religion had its toll on the relationship between

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2 Loewenthal refers to Freud's remarks about religion as being "naughty, though witty and plausible". See, Kate M. Loewenthal, *The Psychology of Religion: a Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2000), 8.

psychology and religion. More importantly, as psychology itself began to be influenced by the behaviourist approach (an exaggeration of observation and experimentation) since B.F. Skinner, religion was largely neglected within psychological enquiry in the early half of the 20th century. For instance, psychology text books hardly included 'religion' in their indices.[3] This neglect of religion was also a result, at one level, of the conscious separation between science and religion, and on another level it was the mirroring of the increasing secularism, and the divide between religious and social life.

Fortunately, in the past three decades or so there has been a revived interest among psychologists in the study of religion. Psychology of religion became a division within the American Psychology Association (APA) in 1976. Though the current situation is far from ideal[4], religion is gaining increased currency within mainstream psychology. Several solid text books on psychology of religion have been published, and these have gone through various editions.[5] Besides a plethora of academic journals on the subject, there are also several graduate courses being offered in many universities with specialisation in psychology *of* religion, or psychology *and* religion, or pastoral psychology.[6]

Psychology of religion studies areas such as religious traditions and psychotherapy; religious experience including anomalous phenomena like

3 Bernard Spilka, "The Current State of the Psychology of Religion, Bulletin of the Council of for the Study of Religion, 9 (1978) 96-99. Also, Bernard Spilka, Glenn Comp and W. Mack Goldsmith. "Faith and Behavior: Religion in Introductory Psychology Texts of the 1950s and 1970s." *Teaching of Psychology* , 8, no.3 (1981) 158.

4 Elizabeth Lehr and Bernard Spilka. "Religion in the Introductory Psychology Textbook: A Comparison of Three Decades." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 28, no. 3 (September 1989), 366.

5 For instance, Ralph W. Hood, Peter C. Hill and Bernard Spilka, *The Psychology of Religion : An Empirical Approach*, 4th ed. New York: Guilford, 2009; David H. Wulff, *Psychology of Religion: Classic and Contemporary Views*, 2nd ed. (New York: John Wiley & Sons Inc., 1997); Kate M. Loewenthal, *The Psychology of Religion: a Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2000).

6 For current information on psychology of religion visit: http://www.psywww.com/psyrelig/index.htm (accessed: 30 April 2011).

visions and glossolalia; religious development from childhood to later life; religious conversion; religion and social behaviour; religious influence on personality; effect of religious practices like meditation and prayer on mental health and wellbeing; religion and affective states which include emotional experiences like awe.[7] From the perspective of evolutionary psychology there are studies that examine the origins of religious belief, particularly answering the question: is the human brain hardwired for religion? As regards the methods used in this branch of psychology, quantitative data are mostly drawn from self-reported questionnaires; however, in the recent years other empirical methods like biofeedback systems and F-MRI scans of the brain have also been used. On the other hand, qualitative studies often help to examine the phenomena in detail and generate hypotheses.

The aim of the present chapter within this volume on *Education of the young* is to enumerate some interesting insights from the psychology of religion that are relevant to education and youth formation. Given the limitation of space this treatment is going to be a simple introduction. At any rate, this is envisaged as a modest attempt to point out that educational policy and practice have much to learn from the psychological study of religion.

0.2. From Religion-versus-Spirituality to Religious-Spirituality

In the recent years, it has become a matter of routine in the introductory sections of the works of psychology of religion,[8] and indeed in other social sciences studying religion,[9] to make a distinction between religion and spirituality. The titles of several academic journals also respect this distinction. There is an ongoing discussion on whether the Division 36 of the American

7 See, Richard L. Gorsuch, "Psychology Of Religion", *Annual Review of Psychology*, 39 (1988) 201.

8 Peter C. Hill and Kenneth I. Paragament, "Advances in the conceptualization and measurement of religion and spirituality: implication for physical and mental health research". *American Psychologist*, 58 (2003) 64-65; Hood, Hill and Spilka, *The psychology of religion : An empirical approach*, 8-11; Wulff, *Psychology of Religion: Classic and Contemporary Views*, 5-7.

9 Paul Heelas, Linda Woodhead, Benjamin Seel and Bronislaw Szerszynski. *The spiritual revolution: Why religion is giving way to spirituality* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005); George Ludskow, *The sociology of Religion: A substantive and transdisciplinary approach* (California: Pine Forge Press, 2008).

Psychological Association (APA) should be renamed as 'Psychology of Religion and Spirituality'.[10] These academic efforts may be a response to a growing expression among individuals in some Western societies: "I am spiritual, but not religious." In this context, often religion is defined in terms of being organisational, ritualistic and ideological. On the other hand, spirituality is seen to be individualistic, affective, and experiential.[11]

In the context of the present chapter, I would like to suggest that the distinction between religion and spirituality may be necessary in some societies but not sufficient for a global perspective. Also because, sometimes in Western scholarship this distinction between religion and spirituality is exaggerated to be a separation, negating the possible co-existence of these two constructs. Is not this hair-splitting academic gimmick really superfluous? Is this yet another of the Western/Eurocentric constructs purporting to explain social phenomena that might be typically only Western, and in due course could become global just because the media (and the academic journals) are dominated by a Western worldview? In short, could there be a comprehensive model that would lend itself for an inclusive approach in the study of religion? In attempting to answer these questions, I suggest that the entire human endeavour to search for meaning systems centred on the sacred cannot just be limited to mutually exclusive constructs of religion and spirituality. We might need other constructs: for instance, 'religious spirituality'.

In this context, I find Allport's distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic religion still useful.[12] This could contribute to a more sophisticated discussion on the matter, rather than polarising the discussion in terms of religion and spirituality. Initially, Allport talked about 'mature and immature religion',

10 Kenneth Pargament, "The Psychology of Religion and Spirituality? Yes and No." *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*, *9* (1999), 3-20; Hans Stifoss-Hanssen, "Religion and Spirituality: What a European Ear Hears", *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*, *9* (1999), 25-33.

11 Pargament, "The Psychology of Religion and Spirituality? Yes and No."

12 Gordon W. Allport, *The individual and his religion: A psychological interpretation*. New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1950.

but as this terminology seems value-laden, authors these days prefer to use the term, 'intrinsic and extrinsic religion'. He described 'the mature religious sentiment' in terms of the following attributes:[13]

- Differentiation: arriving at a multiplicity of religious sentiments (beliefs and expressions) through a reflective and even critical process. The individual expresses an internal order of religious sentiments which are maintained in a multiplicity.
- Dynamism: the mature religious sentiment exhibits a willingness to break out of the comfort zone of magical thinking and self-justification.
- Consistent morality: when intense religious sentiment is able to transform character, "producing moral zeal, engendering consistency upon men's purposes."[14]
- Comprehensive: mature sentiment is ordered and coherent, infused with motive. Since mature faith just knows 'God is' but does not narrowly insist 'God is precisely what I say He is'; it is tolerant and inclusive.
- Integral: mature religious sentiment expresses harmony that brings about freedom.
- Fundamentally heuristic: "A heuristic belief is one that is held tentatively until it can be confirmed or until it helps us discover a more valid belief."[15]

This list resembles very much the description of spirituality, at least as presented by some authors.[16] Therefore, I see spirituality as related to mature religious sentiment. There is some empirical support for this claim.[17]

13 Allport, *The individual and his religion*, 64-83.

14 Allport, *The individual and his religion*, 76.

15 Allport, *The individual and his religion*, 81.

16 Hood, Hill and Spilka, *The psychology of religion*; Wulff, *Psychology of Religion: Classic and Contemporary Views*.

17 Vicky Genia, "The Spiritual Experience Index: Revision and reformulation", *Review of Religious Research*, *38* (1997) 344-361.

This type of mature attitude is also observable among adherents of various religions. That is why I submit that while someone can be religious without being spiritual, and another can be spiritual without being religious, there is a possibility for yet another to exhibit a mature, intrinsic religiosity that I call 'religious-spirituality'. The present chapter is to be situated within the realm of religious-spirituality, even if, for the sake of simplicity, the word 'religion' is being used throughout the text.

Moreover, the concept of religious-spirituality is relevant to the present discussion on education in India because the separation between religion and spirituality could be superfluous to the Indian population in general among whom there might not be a distinction between the sacred and profane,[18] and since in India, religion permeates almost every aspect of life. Secondly, it is the spiritual aspects of religion that are more crucial to education. Spirituality opens up the individual to "a search for meaning, for unity, for connectedness, for transcendence, and for the highest of human potential."[19] Therefore, in the following pages, when we talk about religion, it is this type of mature religious-spirituality that we are concerned with.

0.3. Lessons for Education from Psychology of Religion: The Scope of this Chapter

In one of the earliest research works on education in India by a Western scholar, William Chamberlain emphatically acknowledged the relationship between education and religion: "What is true of the development of the German school system, in more recent times, is also true of the developing of the educational system in India in past centuries: the clue must be found in the religious ideals, as tempered by the prevailing social and political influences."[20]

18 See, Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart, *Sacred and Secular: Religion and Politics Worldwide* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

19 Robert A. Emmons, *The psychology of ultimate concerns: Motivation and spirituality in personality* (New York: Guilford Press, 1999), 5.

20 Originally written as a doctoral dissertation in 1889, now published as: William I. Chamberlain, *Education in India* (Charleston: Bibliobazaar, 1996).

This profound relationship between religion and education that we perceive in practice even today, has largely been reduced to a mere mention of 'the spiritual' on just one occasion in the Indian National Policy on Education: "In our national perception, education is essential for all. This is fundamental to our all-round development, material and spiritual."[21] Nonetheless, this statement reiterates the Gandhian ideal of 'New Education' (*Nai Talim*), by which he meant the all-round drawing out of the best in child and man – body, mind and spirit. According to him, the object of education is the physical, intellectual and moral development of the child.

These ideals of education are rendered in contemporary expression by UNESCO. The Report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the 21st Century spoke of four pillars of Education.[22] To each of these pillars, I would like to add an insight from the psychology of religion:

- *Learning to know*: "the school should impart both the desire for, and pleasure in, learning the ability to learn how to learn, and intellectual curiosity." This knowledge needs to be transformed to wisdom with an awareness of the existence of the Greater Power.
- *Learning to do:* "In addition to learning to do a job or work, it should, more generally entail the acquisition of a competence that enables people to deal with a variety of situations, often unforeseeable...." In this connection, young people need to be helped to build a sense of purpose in life.
- *Learning to live together*: "by developing an understanding of others and their history, traditions and spiritual values and, on this basis, creating a new spirit which, guided by recognition of our growing interdependence...to manage conflicts in an intelligent and peaceful way."

21 Indian National Policy on Education, 1986 (modified in 1992; reissued in 1998), no.2.1.

22 Following quotes are from Jacques Delors, "Education: the Necessary Utopia," *Learning: The Treasure Within: Report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the 21st Century*, 1996.

- *Learning to be:* "everyone will need to exercise greater independence and judgement combined with a stronger sense of personal responsibility for the attainment of common goals." Generally, education should aim at the wellbeing of individuals and society.

These four pillars of education will form the four major parts of this chapter. Furthermore, for each of these sections the chapter will focus on one basic insight from the psychology of religion. In each section, we will first explore the theoretical framework from which the insight is drawn and then point out to some implications for education in the Indian context. Finally, I invite the reader to note that in this essay I take a broader view of education, which includes the formal, non-formal and the informal approaches in education. It would be too confining to consider education exclusive to school-based learning. Therefore, the lessons drawn from psychology of religion in the following discussion could be applicable to youth formation in general, be it in a school or church or youth work context.

1. Learning to Know: Lessons from Cognitive Science of Religion for Education

One of the claims of recent research in cognitive science of religion is that children, at least by the age of seven, have a concept of God that goes beyond a merely anthropomorphic image; they are able to acknowledge that this supernatural agent has access to their thoughts and intentions; that is, the supernatural agent has a Privileged Epistemic Access that is quite different from the way human agents know.[23]

Understandably, evolutionary psychologists are not concerned with demonstrating the ontological existence of the Privileged Epistemic Access, nor are they 'proving' the existence of a Supernatural Being. They only point to the propensity of the human mind to recognise supernatural agents and their

23 Rebekah Rickert and Justin L. Barrett, "Do you see what I see? Young children's assumptions about God's perceptual abilities", *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*, 15 (2005) 283-295; Nicola Knight, Paulo Sousa, Justin L. Barrett, and Scott Atran, "Children's attributions of beliefs to humans and God: cross-cultural evidence", *Cognitive Science*, 28 (2004) 117-126.

ability for epistemic access to the human mind. They furnish the arguments on the basis of the underlying adaptive processes that accompanied the evolution of the human mind. These findings make it possible to adequately comprehend the cognitive hardware – the information-processing systems - that characterise the human mind.

1.1. What is Divine Epistemic Access?

Here, I present a syllogistic summary of insights from cognitive science of religion that are relevant to our discussion, then I point out some implications for education.

Minimal Counter-intuitiveness: The human mind has a tremendous capacity to register and recall, what Pascal Boyer calls, "minimal counter-intuitiveness". 'Counter-intuitive categories' include "information contradicting some information provided by ontological categories."[24] Ontological categories are objects that we experience in the world. For instance, from our experience of things out in the world, we know that tables do not talk. However, the human mind is capable of not only conceiving but also of being comfortable with the concept of a table that can talk. This is a counter-intuitive category. At the same time, in dealing with counter-intuitive categories the human mind has its own logic. While conceiving a tree that can talk seems possible, a tree that gives birth to an animal seems an exaggeration or even an anomaly, and hence unacceptable. This implicit logic is what Boyer calls, *minimal* counter-intuitiveness. The ability of the human mind to be comfortable with, to make sense of, to remember, and to pass on these counter-intuitive categories to future generations, according to evolutionary psychologists, makes religious beliefs possible.

Hypersensitive Agency Detection: How are counter-intuitive categories extracted from human epistemic experience? The human mind is like a

24 Pascal Boyer, *Religion Explained: The human instincts that fashion gods, spirits and ancestor* (London: Random House, 2001), 74.

workshop; it makes use of different tools. One of the tools that it uses in dealing with religious beliefs is what Justin Barrett calls, the Hypersensitive Agency Detection Device.[25] It is the ability of the human mind to recognise intentional and non-intentional cause in events in the world of phenomena. If we see the branches of a tree moving, then by observing the patterns we know if the movement is caused by wind, or an animal, or another human being. Originally, this was a device to protect other human agents from possible harm. However, this hypersensitive agency detention device is capable of delivering false-positives; that is, when there is only a non-intentional agent, for the sake of safety of humans, the mind may detect it to be an intentional agent. This hypersensitivity could account for the genesis and persistence of human beliefs about a world populated by invisible supernatural agents, both benevolent and malevolent: tree spirits, demons, gods, angels, ghosts and so on.

Divine Epistemic Access: Available ethnographic data further demonstrate that belief in the existence of supernatural agents is also accompanied by an awareness that these agents possess a privileged access to human mental states. This is what is called the 'Divine Epistemic Access.'[26] Studies made on children demonstrate that even before they acquire a theological system, they acknowledge that the divine mind is capable of having access to their own mind, unlike any other human agent.[27]

The experiment consists in showing a child (3 year old) a closed biscuit-box. The experimenter asks the child, "What do you think is inside this box?" Of course, the child is prompt in answering, "Biscuits". Now the experimenter opens the box and shows the child that actually there are stones inside the

25 Justin Barrett, *Why would anyone believe in God?* (California: Atamira Press, 2004); Justin Barrett, "Cognitive Science of Religion: What is it and why is it?" *Religion Compass*, 1 (2007) 1-19.

26 Justin Barrett, "Cognitive Science of Religion: What is it and why is it?"

27 Rickert and Barrett, "Do you see what I see? Young children's assumptions about God's perceptual abilities"; Knight, Sousa, Barrett, and Atran, "Children's attributions of beliefs to humans and God: cross-cultural evidence".

box. Then the experimenter continues, "If we were to close this box, and ask your mum, do you think she would know that there are stones inside the box, instead of biscuits?" The child often says, "No, she wouldn't know." The experimenter goes on to ask, "Now that you know about the contents, and you have not told her that you know about it, do you think, your mum would guess that you know about the real contents of the box?" The child would say, "No, she wouldn't know." Now the experiment is taken to a second level. The experimenter asks the child, "Let us suppose that there is a 'supernatural being' (like God). Would this being know that the box actually has stones instead of biscuits?" The common answer among children is, "Yes." "And would this supernatural being know that you too know about the real contents of the box?" Again the common reply from the child is, "Yes."

This divine knowledge is perceived to be infallible. Further, it is no particular problem to children that 'God' is unseen.

Moral Connotation of Divine Epistemic Access: Divine epistemic access has a strong moral association. Children know that God does not harbour false beliefs. They make a distinction between how human agents know things, and how God does.[28] Here is an example from Boyer[29] to show how people in general do not associate God's knowledge with trivial matters – such as stones in a biscuit box. No one theologises on whether God knows what is in the refrigerator of their household. However, if they have the severed head of an enemy in the refrigerator then they are aware that God knows what is in there.

Evolutionary psychologists argue that this ability of the human mind to accommodate the belief that supernatural beings know what is in our minds, helps to monitor antisocial behaviour. These beliefs were duly passed on to

28 Jesse E. Bering and Dominic D. Johnson, "'O Lord... you perceive my thoughts from afar': recursiveness and the evolution of supernatural agency." *Journal of Cognition and Culture*, 5 (2005) 121.

29 Boyer, *Religion Explained: The human instincts that fashion gods, spirits and ancestor*

children, in a system of reward and punishment, to avoid social exclusion or death. The punishments were perceived to be borne by the transgressing individual or the innocent community. Thus, fear of adverse effects readily encouraged confessions of covert actions and secret intentions. As a result, the human mind became wired for divine epistemic access.

1.2. Implication of Divine Epistemic Access in Education

As I have said above, the aim of evolutionary psychology is not to 'prove' the existence of God or supernatural agents. Psychologists are only examining the characteristics of the human mind, and in this case, to show how the mind might be programmed to believe in supernatural agents and to attribute certain ability to these agents, particularly in their access to the contents of the human mind. On the other hand, this discussion within psychology is not to be taken to show that God is merely an invention of the human mind. This is not implied by psychological insights. From a theological perspective, on the contrary, we can argue that God had to facilitate the evolution of the human mind in such a way that it would be ready to believe in Him. In any case, our main concern here is to point out to the educational implication of this characteristic of the human mind.

The Bible says, "The fear of Yahweh is a school of wisdom".[30] In the light of the insight from the evolutionary psychology and cognitive science of religion we can interpret the 'fear of the Lord' as the awareness of the existence of God and the acceptance of the truth that God has access to my inner cognitive processes. This awareness challenges the human person to become morally responsible. The knowledge that a person possesses begins to acquire a moral implication – here, knowledge becomes wisdom.

In the context of education of young people, Don Bosco – a 19th century Catholic priest and educationist – was wont to tell the young people,

30 Proverb 10:33, NJB, See also: Job 28:28; Ps 111:10; Prov 3:7; Prov 9:10; Sir 1:14, 16, 18, 20, 27; Isa 33:6.

"God sees you!" This apparent religious expression makes perfect sense in the light of the insights from cognitive science of religion as we have discussed above. The awareness of the divine epistemic access invites the young person to listen to their inner voice and to reflect responsibly on the implications of their choices in terms of intentions and actions. Therefore, the neglect of religion in education not only forgets the fact that the human mind is hardwired for religion, it also fails to make use of the possibility to encourage moral behaviour based on an instinctive inner voice that religions have referred to as 'conscience'.

2. Learning to Do: Religion and the Sense of Purpose

2.1. Sense of Purpose

Drawing on from several in-depth interviews that he and his team conducted, William Damon, of Harvard University, presents an important situation among the young people of today.[31] His landmark study suggests that one-fifth of the youth of the U.S. are thriving. They are highly engaged in activities that they love. They have clear sense of what they want in life. They experience a lot of energy and general wellbeing. On the other hand, the other four-fifths of the young population is not clear about what they want in life. They are wasting their energy, and without some serious mentoring, they may not reach their full potential. The difference between these two groups of young people is the "sense of purpose". A clear sense of purpose in life not only prevents young people from engaging in deviant behaviour, but also provides meaning in life, and contributes to wellbeing – better health of mind and body.

This is a contemporary rendering in terms of 'positive psychology',[32] of what humanistic psychology has been saying since Viktor Frankl (1905-

31 William Damon, *The Path to Purpose: How Young People Find their Calling in Life* (New York: Free Press, 2008).

32 The fourth section in this chapter will elaborate the meaning of positive psychology.

1997), Abraham Maslow (1908-1970), Carl Rogers (1902-1987), and others. In simple terms, humanistic psychology (the 3rd force in psychology) asserted that human beings are not merely driven by irrational unconscious forces (the position of psychoanalysis – the 1st force in psychology), nor is human behaviour just a set of responses to stimuli (the position of behaviourism – the 2nd force in psychology) but individual human beings are motivated by subjective, conscious experiences. One of the aspects that provide motivation for human existence is meaning. In this context, Viktor Frankl's *Man's Search for Meaning* is well known; it has sold nine million copies. The main thesis of the book is that striving to find meaning in life is the primary motivational force in human beings.[33]

This process of meaning-making is closely linked with religion. Rollo May, another humanistic psychologist, defined religion "as the assumption that life has meaning. Religion is whatever the individual takes to be his ultimate concern. One's religious attitude is to be found at that point where he has a conviction that there are values in human existence worth living and dying for." [34]

The concept of 'ultimate concerns' is further explored in the works of Robert Emmons.[35] Based on the observations of the theologian Paul Tillich, Emmons investigates the role of religion and spirituality in determining the ultimate concern. He equates spiritual strivings to ultimate concerns. This includes striving towards wholeness. Emmons points out that "a religious perspective can illuminate the origins of some of the most profound human strivings. Religions, as authoritative faith traditions, are systems of information that provide individuals with knowledge and resources for living a life of purpose and direction."[36]

33 Viktor Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning* (London: Rider, 1959).
34 Rollo May, *Existential Psychotherapy* (Toronto: Bryant Press, 1972), 180.
35 Emmons, *The Psychology of Ultimate Concerns: Motivation and Spirituality in Personality*.
36 Robert A. Emmons and Raymond F. Paloutzian. "The Psychology of Religion," *Annual Review of Psychology* 54 (2003) 392.

William Damon himself acknowledges the role of religion in the path to purpose among young people: "Another powerful long-standing source for finding purpose in life is religious belief. ... Every religious tradition advances the notion that the closer we come to God's purpose for us, the more satisfied we shall become in our daily lives."[37] Several of the people he interviewed were people who were strongly committed to their faith. They told researchers that they felt gratitude, and a sense of resilience in their path towards the fulfilment of their purpose of life that was inspired by faith in God. Damon concludes that the sense of purpose and meaning takes on a deeper significance when life is looked at as a 'calling'.

The further insight emerging from research projects based on positive psychology is that happiness and wellbeing are seen as being clearly associated with goal, purpose and meaning-making. Not surprisingly, to a great degree, depression and suicidal behaviour, and to a lesser degree, alcohol abuse, are correlated to hopelessness.[38] This hopelessness is understood as the absence of purpose in life, and more precisely, the lack of self-efficacy and problem-solving abilities.

2.2. Educational Implication: Focussing on Higher Purpose

The danger of the contemporary educational trends in India is that it might end up producing young people who are like "battery-hens" that are trained only to do a job.[39] They might lack a sense of purpose that is beyond themselves. As Damon points out, the sense of purpose is often something outside oneself, and is altruistic. "Only a positive, pro-social purpose can provide the lasting inspiration, motivation, and resilience that is characteristic

37 Damon, *The Path to Purpose*, 44-45.
38 David E. Schotte and George A. Clum, "Suicide ideation in a college population: A test of a model", *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* 50 (1982) 690–696.
39 See, John Abbot, "Battery Hens or Free range Chickens: What kind of Education for what kind of World?" European Council of International Schools Annual Conference - The Gray Mattern Memorial Address. http://www.21learn.org/site/archive/battery-hens-or-free-range-chickens-what-kind-of-education-for-what-kind-of-world-full-speech/ (accessed: 16/05.2011).

of a truly purposeful life. ... We are programmed (hardwired) to experience a sense of "moral elevation" when we behave benevolently and empathetically towards others."[40]

On the other hand, we do hear of some best practices in this regard. In a BBC documentary (on 19 May 2008) Sanjeev Bhasker reported how children from a posh school in Calcutta go out regularly for a few hours to teach the less privileged children in the neighbourhood. This programme of 'Recycled Education' not only helped the slum children, but also those who were teaching were motivated towards a larger purpose in life. In a similar vein, it is an interesting practice in schools to have children come up with a mission statement, or a set of career objectives, and some strategies on how they would achieve these objectives. These practices, without doubt, establish a sense of purpose in the lives of young people. This sense of purpose in turn generates much energy in their daily functioning and a sense of wellbeing in the long run.

When this sense of purpose is combined with a sense of 'calling' that is permeated by an aspect of faith, it takes on a higher level of motivation. It provides a meaning in life. As Damon claims, this type of 'calling' generates energy, flow and life satisfaction among young people.

3. Learning to Live Together: Formation and Transformation of Character

One of the aims of education is formation of character. Put negatively, education also attempts to prevent deviant behaviour among young people. In both these functions, religion can play a vital role. Jessor's Problem Behaviour Theory is a parsimonious psycho-social framework that attempts to explainv deviant behaviour especially among young people.[41] The theory comprises of

40 Damon, *The Path to Purpose*, 40.

41 Richard Jessor, "Problem-Behavior Theory, Psychosocial Development, and Adolescent Problem Drinking", *British Journal of Addiction 82* (1987) 331-342; Richard Jessor and Shirley L. Jessor, *Problem behavior and psychosocial development: a longitudinal study of youth* (New York: Academic Press, 1977).

three conceptual systems of psychosocial influence – Personality System, the Perceived Environment System, and the Behaviour System. Each of these systems is made up of variables that are said to instigate a problem behaviour or control against it, and together, they generate a dynamic state of proneness to the transgression of normative behaviour. Religiosity is one of the variables that features very strongly in what Jessor refers to as personality systems.

In this section, I would like to examine the role of religion in social behaviour among young people. This will be examined under two aspects: (1) the proscriptive role of religion – that is, how religion prevents deviant behaviour and helps in the formation of character; (2) the transformative role of religion – that is, what role can religion play in the conversion or sudden transformation of individuals, particularly young people.

3.1. Formation of Character: Proscriptive Role of Religion

Religions have their social functions; they are agents of the socialization of their adherents. Socialization is the interactive process through which an individual learns the basic skills, values, beliefs and behaviour pattern of a society. There are several agents that facilitate this process. First among them would be the family. In the contemporary world, school and media are also gaining upper hand as agents of socialization. Sociologists agree that, to varying degrees, religion is an agent of socialization.[42] While in the West, due to secularism the role of religion may be insignificant among large numbers of people, in India religion still plays an important role, particularly in the transmission of values.

Religion carries out the socialization process of its adherents through the use of three major strategies:[43] social cohesion, social control and emotional support. All agents of socialization may use these strategies, but I think the

42 It should be noted that religion is also a major provider of education in the history of the world, and particularly in India up to the present day.

43 See, Emile Durkheim, *Suicide: A Study in Sociology* (New York: Free Press, 1951); Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion* (Boston: beacon Press, 1963).

third factor is the strongest in religion, especially in traditional societies. Religion, by offering emotional support, helps people to cope with suffering and deprivation, while providing answers to ultimate questions - of life, death, suffering, love, and so on.

Religion conditions individuals by strengthening their bonds with the group. In this way, religion not only provides a sense of belonging to its adherents, but also steers them into an acceptable social behaviour. For example, Durkheim found that suicide rates were lowest among those people who had strongest attachment to religious groups.

As an example, let us examine the ample evidence that suggests that religiosity and spirituality could protect young people from addictive behaviour. The following points can be summarised from available reviews:[44]

- Affiliation with a faith community may guard against substance use by instilling moral values. This proscriptive benefit of religion may be achieved by social control generated by the norms of the community. Religion may also improve coping skills and reduce stress and thus indirectly guard against psychological triggers.
- On another level, spirituality based treatments are also effective in facilitating recovery from addiction. These programmes could be grouped under three major types: 1) Non-affiliated spiritual programmes that recognise belief in a God and may be also used in religious contexts, like the 12-Steps programme; 2) Religiously affiliated programmes which also include therapeutic communities that are supported by specific faith-based organisations; and 3) Secular

44 Peter L. Benson, "Religion and substance use", in Schumaker (Ed.), *Religion and mental health* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 211-220; Jennifer Booth and John E. Martin, "Spiritual and religious factors in substance use, dependence, and recovery", in Harold G. Koenig (Ed.) , *Handbook of religion and mental health* (San Diego, CA US: Academic Press, 1998), 175-200; Christopher C.H. Cook, "Addiction and spirituality", *Addiction*, 99 (2004) 539-551; Christopher C.H. Cook, "Substance Misuse", In Christopher Cook et al (Eds.) *Spirituality and psychiatry* (London: RCPsych Publications, 2009), 139-168.

spiritual programmes that may not explicitly believe in a higher power. Results emerging from studies that examine these approaches are generally optimistic, though there are some exceptions. After closely examining these outcomes Christopher Cook concludes in a research review: "Despite the various limitations of these studies, on the basis of the evidence to date it would appear that treatment in programmes that incorporate spirituality is at least as effective as other forms of treatment. Further, there is reason to believe that spirituality is positively associated with abstinence ...." [45]

On an affirmative note on the formation of character, positive psychology has described human strengths in terms of virtues that contribute to wellbeing and happiness.[46] They list six virtues that group character strengths that have been traditionally emphasised in religious training: wisdom & knowledge (creativity, open-mindedness, love for learning), courage (perseverance, integrity, vitality), humanity (love, generosity, compassion, care, social intelligence), justice (social responsibility, teamwork, leadership), temperance (forgiveness, humility, modesty, prudence, self-control), and transcendence (awe, gratitude, hope, humour, spirituality). Some of these virtues and character strengths have been referred to as gifts of the Holy Spirit in the Christian tradition.[47] Moreover, some of these character strengths have resemblance to, what William James described as 'saintliness' which according to him is an outcome of religious experience.[48]

This takes us to the second aspect of our discussion in this section, namely, the role of religion in the transformation of young people's behaviour, particularly in the context of religious conversion.

45 Cook, *Spirituality and psychiatry*, 150.

46 Christopher Peterson and Martin E. P. Seligman, *Character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook and Classification* (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2004), 58-81.

47 Phyllis Zagano and Kevin Gillespie, "Ignatian spirituality and Positive Psychology", *The Way*, 45 (2006) 41-48.

48 William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (London: Fontana Library, 1971), 269.

3.2. Transformation of Character: Religious Conversion

Religious conversion is a much studied topic under psychology of religion. Conversion is understood here as a profound change that is facilitated by a religious experience. In this context, conversion does not necessarily entail a change of adherence to a particular religion but often it is a covert transformation of outlook that is also perceived in overt behaviour.

This type of conversion in the context of religious experience could be sudden or gradual.[49] The use of conversion of Saul of Tharsis (St Paul) as a prototype alludes to the understanding of conversion being sudden. Generally, conversion entails a process of searching, meaning-making and even confusion. This could be conscious or unconscious. This journey is also marked by milestones – certain powerful particular instances that provide an aspect of suddenness to conversion. Usually individuals might recall one intense experience even if it was only a climax in a long process.

What is important to note in the context of the present discussion on youth and education is that many conversion researches attest adolescence as a typical stage for religious conversion. Starbuck approximated a mean age of 16.4 years, attributing conversion to those who possess a "... high degree of sensibility, are passively suggestible, and who expect to experience it", particularly among adolescents and women.[50] More recently, some studies have shown the average age of conversions to be 18.[51]

These research findings imply that when occasions for religious experience can be created in the educational programme for young people, formation

49 James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*; Walter H. Clark, *The Psychology of Religion: An Introduction to Religious Experience and Behaviour*. New York: Macmillan, 1958; Carl W. Christensen, "Religious conversion in adolescence", *Pastoral Psychology*, 16 (1995) 17-28; Pamela C. Lee, "Christian conversion stories of African American women: A qualitative analysis", *Journal of Psychology and Christianity*, 27 (2008) 238-252.

50 Edwin D. Starbuck, *Psychology of Religion: An Empirical Study of the Growth of Religious Consciousness* (LLC, Kessinger Publishing, 2006).

51 Lee, "Christian conversion stories of African American women: A qualitative analysis."

and transformation of the character of young people can be facilitated. This evidence from the study of religious conversion once again reiterates the importance of religion in education.

4. Learning to Be: Towards Wellbeing through Effective Role of Religion in Education

One of the aims, or perhaps even the sole purpose, of education is holistic human development. Development is increasingly defined these days in terms of 'quality of life'[52] and wellbeing. Even psychology, which was traditionally focussed on pathology, has begun particularly in the past two decades focussed on wellbeing. In this section, I would like to explore the concept of wellbeing as understood within the discourse of positive psychology, then to show how religion could contribute to wellbeing, and thus point out how religiously inspired education could play an important role in human wellbeing.

4.1. Understanding Wellbeing: Insights from Positive Psychology

In 1998, when Martin Seligman was elected as the president of the American Psychology Association (APA) he extended a clarion call to psychology to focus on wellbeing and happiness as it does on pathology and psychological disorder. The stream of psychological accent that followed is referred to as 'positive psychology'. This is not a new school of psychology but only a new approach.

One of the major points of discussion within positive psychology is to define wellbeing and happiness. A rudimentary way of defining wellbeing is in terms of what Csikszentmihalyi calls, 'flow': the mental state experienced during 'an autotelic activity' during which a person in an activity is fully immersed in a feeling of energized focus marked by loss of sense of time and space.[53]

52 Martha C. Nussbaum and Amartya Sen, *The Quality of Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

53 Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: The classic work on how to achieve happiness* (London: Random House, 2002).

Generally, flow occurs when there is a balance between skills and challenges in the individual's functioning. In relation to wellbeing, some studies have shown that the state of flow alone cannot sufficiently explain all the constructs associated with happiness and wellbeing.[54] Csikszentmihalyi himself accepts that people experiencing a state of flow may not generally acknowledge that they are happy. He attributes this to the condition that they are too involved in the task that they may not be aware of the subjective state. It could also be that flow alone does not sufficiently account for wellbeing.

For this reason, positive psychology has begun to explore wellbeing using the parlance of Greek philosophical terminology of *hedonia* and *eudaimonia.*[55] While *hedonia* refers to those aspects of wellbeing that flow from pleasure-oriented activities, *eudaimonia* refers to fulfilment of our potential as human beings. Positive psychology literature makes some distinction between psychological wellbeing, social wellbeing, and emotional wellbeing.[56] These three types of wellbeing are not always agreed upon as referring to the same realities.

Subjective Wellbeing: Diener[57] has been consistent in the use of the term Subjective Well-Being, to include happiness, life- satisfaction, presence of positive affect, and absence of negative affect. Subjective well-being is an experience of an individual, which excludes objective conditions like health, comfort, virtue and wealth. In some literature the terms subjective wellbeing and emotional wellbeing are used synonymously.[58]

54 Joar Vittersø, "Flow Versus Life Satisfaction: A Projective Use of Cartoons to Illustrate the Difference Between the Evaluation Approach and the Intrinsic Motivation Approach to Subjective Quality of Life", *Journal of Happiness Studies, 4* (2003) 141-167.

55 Edward Deci, and Richard Ryan, "Hedonia, eudaimonia, and well-being: an introduction", *Journal of Happiness Studies, 9* (2008), 1-11.

56 Corey Keyes and Shane Lopez, "Toward a science of mental health: Positive directions in diagnosis and interventions", in C.P. Snyder and Shane Lopez, *Handbook of positive psychology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002) 45-59.

57 Ed Diener, "Subjective well-being", *Psychological Bulletin, 95* (1984) 542-575.

58 C.R. Snyder and Shane Lopez, *Positive Psychology: the scientific and practical explorations of human strengths* (California: Sage, 2007), 71.

Psychological Wellbeing: Ryff and colleagues have been critical of identifying psychological health with subjective wellbeing,[59] and have preferred to use the term 'human flourishing' or 'psychological wellbeing'. In this understanding, wellbeing is not synonymous with happiness, and their approach to defining wellbeing is clearly in terms of *eudaimonia.* Here, wellbeing is defined as "the striving for perfection that represents the realization of one's true potential."[60] Psychological wellbeing is measured in terms of six factors: self acceptance – positive attitude towards the self with its multiple aspects including impressions of past life; personal growth – feeling of continued development and being open to new experience; purpose in life – having goals and a sense of direction in life; environmental mastery – feeling competent and being able to manage one's environment, which includes also the community of people; autonomy – ability for self-determination, independence and internal regulation; and finally, positive relations with others – having warm and satisfying relationship with others, and being capable of empathy, affection and intimacy.

Social Wellbeing: As mentioned above, there is the third type of wellbeing that challenges the overly emphasised personal dimensions of wellbeing implied in the subjective and psychological approaches to wellbeing. Scholars have evolved constructs and measures to examine, what they call, social wellbeing.[61] Positive psychology has embraced these three types of wellbeing. Social wellbeing is considered in terms of the following dimensions: social acceptance – positive attitude towards others; social actualization – being optimistic about the future of the society; social contribution – believing that individuals have something valuable to give to the society; social coherence

59 Carol Ryff and Corey Keyes, "The structure of psychological well-being revisited", *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 69* (1995) 719-727.

60 Carol Ryff, "Psychological well-being in adult life", *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 4 (1995) 99–104.

61 James Larson, "The Measurement of Social Well-being", *Social Indicators Research 28*(1993) 285-296.

– understanding the social world as intelligible, logical and predictable; and social integration – feeling part of the community and experiencing a sense of belonging.

We can recognise some aspects that overlap between these three types of wellbeing. For instance, life-satisfaction in subjective wellbeing might have some correspondence to purpose in life in psychological wellbeing, and both might have some resemblance to the dimension of social contribution in social wellbeing.[62] However, it is also obvious that their focus is different.

In any case, these dimensions of wellbeing are useful in understanding holistic development which is the purpose of education. And wellbeing understood in terms of *eudaimonia* presupposes affective states induced by the practice of character strengths.

4.2. Role of Religious-Spirituality in Wellbeing

There is a growing body of empirical studies that has identified significant links between religion, spirituality and wellbeing.[63] As cited above, Cook identified 265 published books and papers that in some way had studied the relationship between spirituality and recovery from addiction. Another area where there is convergence between religious spirituality and wellbeing is in the discussions on coping. Religious coping examines how people seek significance in times of stress; "that significance may be material (e.g., a house), physical (e.g., health), social (e.g., intimate relationships), psychological (e.g., meaning), or spiritual (e.g., closeness with God)".[64]

Research works on mindfulness also bring together spirituality and wellbeing. Mindfulness, which is the age-old process of cultivating awareness in Buddhist traditions, is seen in positive psychology as a means to facilitate

62 Snyder and Lopez, *Positive Psychology,* 71-72

63 Hill and Pargament, "Advances in the conceptualization and measurement of religion and spirituality: implication for physical and mental health research", 64-74.

64 Kenneth Pargament, *The psychology of religion and coping: theory, research, practice* (New York: Guilford Press. 1997), 216.

novelty, flow and optimal experiences. Mindfulness is increasingly used in clinical contexts. Although "empirical literature supporting its efficacy is small," there is a growing support for the claim that "mindfulness-based intervention can be rigorously operationalized, conceptualized, and empirically evaluated"[65] in the context of health and wellbeing.

Besides the effect of religious practices, moral behaviour in terms of virtues and character strengths that are traditionally encouraged by religions are also said to promote wellbeing. There is enough empirical evidence to show that people who are altruistic, sociable and display empathy are consistently happier than others. On the other hand, people suffering from depression are generally self-absorbed, distrustful and focus defensively on their own needs.

Research evidence on the correlation between forgiveness and mental health and wellbeing is also abundant.[66] On one hand, the experience of forgiving others is associated with mental wellbeing and physical health. On the other, the experience of being forgiven by God was related to fewer depressive and anxious symptoms. Interventions to facilitate forgiveness also show significant decrease in grief, anger, and anxiety after treatment.

The enumeration of such research findings can go on. For want of space we limit our discussion to these. In short, what this shows is that constructs that were strictly in the domain of religion and spirituality are now enthusiastically explored by psychology. This implies that education, in an attempt to be secular, does not have to sideline these apparent religious concerns that actually contribute to human wellbeing; after all, quality of life is the ultimate purpose of all education.

65 Ruth Baer, "Mindfulness Training as a Clinical Intervention: A Conceptual and Empirical Review", *Clinical Psychology: Science & Practice, 10* (2003) 125-143; Jon Kabat-Zinn, "Mindfulness-based interventions in context: Past, present, and future", *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice*, 10 (2003) 144-156.

66 McCullogh, M.E., & Witvliet, C.V. The psychology of forgiveness. In C.R. Snyder and Shane Lopez (Eds). *Handbook of Positive Psychology*, (pp.446-458). New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

5. Conclusion

We can summarise the lessons from psychology of religion simply in terms of 'holistic education'.[67] Even if this term has now become something of a cliché, I find it still functional to summarise our discussion here. At one level, it entails the education of the whole person at the cognitive, affective and spiritual levels. On another level, holistic education implies the formation of the young person beyond the confines of the classroom, where, not only is knowledge imparted but also faith and morals are developed. Holistic education aims at the wellbeing of the young person by accompanying him or her in building strengths of character and in establishing higher purpose in life. This is best achieved, as I have tried to argue in this essay, when young people are in the awareness of the presence of God, and want to respond to that presence meaningfully. The following words of Gandhi finely capture this holistic approach to education:

> I hold that true education of the intellect can only come through a proper exercise and training of the bodily organs, e.g., hands, feet, eyes, ears, nose, etc. In other words an intelligent use of the bodily organs in a child provides the best and quickest way of developing his intellect. But unless the development of the mind and body goes hand in hand with a corresponding awakening of the soul, the former alone would prove to be a poor lopsided affair. By spiritual training I mean education of the heart. A proper and all round development of the mind, therefore, can take place only when it proceeds pari passu with the education of the physical and spiritual faculties of the child. They constitute an indivisible whole.[68]

Finally, what I have also attempted to show in this chapter is that religion could play an important role in the building up of the four pillars of this holistic education as also envisaged by UNESCO: "that holistic

67 Ron Miller, "Beyond reductionism: The emerging holistic paradigm in education." *The Humanistic Psychologist*, 28 (2000) 382-393.

68 Mahatma Gandhi, *All Men are Brothers: Autobiographical reflections*. Ed. Kripalani. (New York: Continuum, 1980), 138.

education must acknowledge the multiple dimensions of the human personality – physical, intellectual, aesthetic, emotional and spiritual – thus moving towards the perennial dream of an integrated individual living on a harmonious planet."[69]

69 Karan Singh, "Education for a Global Society," *Learning: The Treasure Within: Report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the 21st Century*, 1996.